

Joker Mine
Medicine Bow National Forest,
3.2 miles northwest of Keystone
Albany County
Wyoming

HAER No. WY-45

HAER
WYO,
1-KESTO.V,
1 -

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Department of the Interior
P.O.Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225-0287

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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
JOKER MINE

I. INTRODUCTION

Location Within the Medicine Bow National Forest about 3.2 miles northwest of Keystone, Wyoming. NE/NW/NW/SW Section 4, T14N, R79W.

USGS Quad: Keystone, Wyoming, 7.5'; (photo revised, 1983).

UTM: 13/392560E/4562650N

Date of Construction: C.1905

Present Owner: Nelson Estate, Thomas Nelson, 1031 Drexel Way, San Jose, California 95121.

Present Use: Abandoned; Hazardous open mine shafts scheduled to be covered in the fall of 1989 while minimizing impacts to historic structural features.

Significance: The Joker Mine, (suspected to have been a gold/copper producer), is significant primarily for the vernacular log architecture exhibited in its shaft house and headframe. Although threatened with eventual collapse as a result of natural decay and weathering, the site presently offers valuable insights into early 20th century mining structures and methods of ore extraction within the Douglas Creek Mining District of southern Wyoming. The site's secluded location has allowed it to largely avoid the disturbances commonly brought about by salvage and vandalism at other more accessible mine sites within the district and elsewhere. As a result of this isolated location, the site retains excellent integrity of setting, conveying a high degree of feeling and association with its period of historical significance.

Historian: Steven R. Whissen, Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality, Abandoned Mine Lands Program.

August, 1989

II. HISTORY

A. OVERVIEW OF MINING IN THE DOUGLAS CREEK DISTRICT, MEDICINE BOW MOUNTAINS

The Douglas Creek Mining District of southern Wyoming is located about 45 miles west of Laramie along the eastern flank of the Medicine Bow Mountains. The district is situated in Albany County within Townships 13, 14 and 15 North, and Ranges 78 and 79 West.[1] Numerous smaller tributaries of Douglas Creek are included in the district, all having been prospected to a greater or lesser degree for gold, copper and other minerals.

Despite accounts of gold discoveries as early as the 1850's, the first documented find in the area is attributed to Iram M. Moore in the fall of 1868. Moore's discovery, (in the gulch which continues to bear his name), led to active prospecting the following year. The Douglas placer district was quickly organized with Moore elected first president. About \$8,000 worth of gold was reportedly taken from the stream gravels of Moore's Gulch in the spring of 1869. This was carried out by simple sluice, rocker and gold panning methods.[2]

From these humble beginnings, placer mining became a large-scale enterprise by the 1890's, with several companies organized to systematically mine the gold deposits along Douglas Creek and its tributaries. The Douglas Consolidated Mining and Milling Company, incorporated in 1892, emerged as the principal placer mining company in the district. Other notable operations included the Home, Albany and Spring Creek placers.[3]

Early in the development of these operations, it was found that much of the recovered gold was coarse, with nuggets occasionally weighing between .8 and 3.4 ounces and containing a considerable amount of quartz.[4] For many prospectors, this fact led to the assumption that the gold had not traveled far from its point of origin. Attention began to focus on promising quartz veins, and numerous lode mining claims were soon filed.

The first authenticated lode claim in the district, (and also evidently the first within Albany County), was the Morning Star, later known as the Douglas Mine. This mine was claimed in 1870 on the west bank of Douglas Creek. The Douglas Mine portended a common pattern of mine development. While likely located originally for its gold prospects, an ore vein was encountered at the 35 ft. level in the shaft which contained abundant copper in various mineralized forms.[5]

Other important gold strikes followed in the Douglas Creek district and elsewhere within the Medicine Bow Mountains: The Centennial Mine in the Centennial Ridge district (1876), the Keystone Mine in the southern portion of the Douglas Creek district (1878), and the Cummins camp at Jelms in 1879.[6] The Douglas Creek district was reportedly worked by some 200 miners by 1878.[7] Total gold production in the district from both lode and placer mines was placed at about \$229,000 by 1893.[8]

Despite this activity and the ongoing promotional efforts of the newspapers and other boosters to extol the area's mineral wealth to potential investors, gold production generally fell short of expectations. Many of the principal lode mines were closed or languishing by 1900. Then, in that year,

rich copper desposits were discovered at the 65 ft. level in the shaft of the New Rambler Mine, situated at the northern end of the district.[9] Located many years earlier for its gold prospects, the Rambler's valuable copper ores brought the mine to the forefront of attention and once again precipitated a mining boom in the area. Henry Beeler, State Geologist, described the Rambler in 1906 as a "veritable museum of copper minerals, and nearly all the known forms have been found here, either in quantity or as specimens." [10] In addition to such rare copper minerals as covellite ("indigo copper"), the mine soon gained further renown for paying quantities of gold, silver, platinum, palladium and other valuable and exotic ores.[11]

By the end of 1900, shipments of high grade Rambler ore were directed to the Argo smelter in Denver.[12] This was accomplished by horse teams freighting the ore the first 45 miles to the Union Pacific rail connection at Laramie. The expense associated with long distance freighting of ores to reduction facilities was a problem which plagued the Rambler and other mines in the district throughout their development. However, the Rambler Copper Company reportedly realized profits of \$1,000 for every 18 tons of ore shipped in its first five carloads to the Argo smelter, despite the high freighting and processing charges.[13] Upon completion of the Boston-Wyoming smelter at Grand Encampment, Wyoming, in 1902, (30 miles west of the Rambler), the mine transferred its ore shipments to that facility. Disastrous fires in 1906 and 1907 destroyed the latter smelter, and the Rambler was once again forced to seek new ore reduction facilities.

By 1902, the Rambler had installed extensive machinery (hoists, pumps, boilers, etc.) and an electric generator which lighted the mine workings and powered the rock drills. Several structures were completed including a large shaft house, laboratory, saw mill, office and bunkhouses.[14] While the mine continued to ship its high grade ores to distant smelters, a 40 ton per day matte smelter was installed at the mine by 1906 to treat the lower grade oxidized ores.[15]

A significant factor in the development and promotional activities of the various Douglas Creek mines throughout the first decade of the 20th century, was undoubtedly the planned introduction of rail service into the remote region. A railroad was considered essential in reducing freight costs and enabling the mines to successfully operate on a paying basis. To this end, the Laramie, Hahns Peak and Pacific Railway was incorporated in 1901 with principal backing supplied by Boston capitalists. The company planned to extend their line from Laramie to the Gold Hill district near Medicine Bow Peak in Carbon County, where the company also owned mining properties.[16] In 1907, after years of speculation and rumors, the company finally completed its line to Centennial, only 30 miles west of Laramie at the eastern base of the Medicine Bow Mountains. The L.H.P.&P. then changed its plans to reach Gold Hill and instead headed south towards the coal fields of North Park, Colorado. The line did, however, pass through Albany, 7-8 miles east of the Douglas Creek district.

In November, 1906, (even before completion of the line to Centennial), the Rambler Mine secured a traffic agreement with the railroad to transport its high grade ore to the Union Pacific and then to smelters at Blue Island,

Illinois.[17] It is unknown whether or not ore was actually shipped to Illinois and if this would in fact have represented a profitable arrangement. At any rate, by 1908 the Rambler had evidently resumed ore shipments to the Argo smelter in Denver, its original shipping destination.[18]

Output from the Douglas Creek mines alone was apparently not profitable enough to offset the L.H.P.&P.'s large bonded indebtedness, and the railroad never gained a sound financial footing. The line went into receivership shortly after reaching Coalmont, Colorado in 1911, and the line was sold in 1914.[19]

Compounding the problems associated with the railroad's failure, the richer copper ores of the district were eventually exhausted. Efforts were directed towards various methods of concentrating the copper, gold, silver and platinum values from the remaining lower grade ores.[20] In the spring of 1910, the Rambler installed a 50 ton concentrating plant in an attempt to sustain its operation. However, fire destroyed the mine buildings in 1918, and despite periodic attempts over the years to reopen the mine, no further known production has resulted.[21] While intermittent mining and prospecting have occurred in the Douglas Creek district since the boom period of the early 1900's, production has essentially been negligible.

B. HISTORY OF THE JOKER MINE

While much of the preceding historical discussion has focused on the New Rambler Mine, generally regarded as the preeminent producer in the Douglas Creek district, the intent has been to establish the chronology and significant events in the Rambler's development in order to establish possible connections with the nearby Joker Mine. The Joker's own history and mineral production are obscure and not well documented in the available geological reports and historical sources. Therefore, much of the Joker's history must be based on reasoned conjecture supported by the available evidence.

The Joker Mine is located at an altitude of 9,620 ft. about .7 mile directly south of the Rambler. It is situated near the crest of a gently sloping ridge separating Bear Creek on the north from Dave Creek on the south. Both Bear and Dave Creeks were placer mined for gold in the latter 19th century and were included in operations known collectively as the Albany Placers.[22] The Joker Mine site is presently within a dense stand of pines, and the previous access road is likewise overgrown with tall lodgepole pines. The site can only be reached at present with a hike of about .3 mile through dense timber. This fact, in addition to the scant publicity the mine has received over the years, have likely contributed to its comparatively unaltered condition and setting.

The original location notice for the Joker claim was not found in the Albany County mining records. However, the Oneida Mining Company, (owner of the mine), was incorporated on May 24, 1902 with incorporation papers filed with the Wyoming Secretary of State's Office on June 20, 1902.[23] The

principal trustees of the company were A.S. Pierce, (president), George W. Bishop, Arthur Taylor, E.C. Sturdevaul, Samuel S. Miller and Mary O. Miller, all of Rhinelander, Wisconsin. The company evidently derived its name from Oneida County, Wisconsin, the county residence of the trustees. A brief announcement of the company's incorporation, capitalization and names of trustees was published in the Laramie Boomerang on June 21, 1902. The company listed its capital stock at one million dollars, with one million shares of one dollar each par value.[24]

Article One of the certificate of incorporation stated the purposes and objectives of the company:

"...to own, purchase, lease, (etc.) real estate and mining property in the State of Wyoming, particularly in the County of Albany, and to construct dams, flumes, ditches, shafts and tunnels,...to erect buildings and mills, purchase material and machinery,..., and do all things necessary and requisite to the carrying on and operating of the milling and mining of gold bearing, silver bearing, copper bearing or any mineral bearing ores..."[25]

The fact that the company had early settled on Albany County to conduct its mining activities tends to indicate that news and promotion of the Douglas Creek district had traveled far in the two previous years since the rich copper discoveries at the New Rambler. The subsequent location of the Oneida Mining Company's claims in close proximity to the Rambler, may also indicate that the company was hoping to intercept the same or similar rich copper vein as the latter mine. It is also possible that the company's hopes lay in reaching valuable platinum deposits, the occurrence of which at the Rambler was announced only a few months previous to the Oneida Mining Company's incorporation.[26]

In December, 1902, it was reported that "Work will be commenced at once on the Joker, and unless all indications are false this will be one of the paying mines before spring." [27] Other than indicating that the company was willing to brave mining operations in the middle of that first winter, this brief statement unfortunately represents practically the sum total of reported information on mining activities at the Joker Mine. This fact has proved particularly puzzling in consideration that nearly all the mines in the district, ever eager to attract investors, generally received a paragraph or two of promotional coverage in the nearby Centennial or Laramie newspapers. One may read into this anomaly perhaps a motive on the company's part to keep discoveries quiet to avoid preemption of its claims or adjacent properties by other mining concerns, but the real reasons may never be known.

The company did certify in 1903 that it had appointed John Roberts as its business agent in Wyoming, with office headquarters in Cheyenne. [28] Because the Joker Mine was the only mining property of record owned by the company in Wyoming, Roberts' responsibilities were in all likelihood comparatively limited.

By 1905, the company apparently felt confident enough in the mineral potential of its claims to commission an official government mineral survey, the first step in securing a claim patent. This survey, (No. 334; see Page no. 20), is perhaps the single best source of information on the development of the Joker Mine. The plat shows that the principal mine area, (the area under present investigations), was located towards the northeast end of the Joker No. 4 claim. This was one of four contiguous lode claims, (Joker Nos. 1-4), filed for amended location on July 26, 1905. The shaft house is clearly

identified on the plat, with a boiler shown adjacent which likely powered the shaft hoist motors, pumps and perhaps rock drills. No evidence of the boiler presently remains. Total prospecting and mining development upon the 73 acres of claims consisted of 4 discovery shafts, 16 additional shafts, one drift, and 7 trenches.[29]

In January, 1906, it was reported that the company was proceeding with plans to patent its claims[30], and in fact received a U.S. mineral patent in December, 1906.[31] It would appear probable that the company's confidence in pursuing a patent at this point in time was influenced to a large degree by demonstrated activity on the part of the Laramie, Hahns Peak and Pacific Railroad to finally extend its line towards the Douglas Creek district. With regard to the Rambler Mine, (the Joker's neighbor to the north), it was reported in 1906 that "The progress of the Laramie, Hahn's Peak and Pacific railroad may have considerable to do with the energy displayed at the mine (Rambler)...(The railroad) would reduce the cost of shipment considerably and allow the mining company to ship much of its mountain of low grade ore now idle on the dump." [32] The Oneida Mining Company was likely hoping as well to profit from the new advantageous shipping possibilities allowed by the railroad's construction. Perhaps even more importantly, the railroad's arrival in the vicinity would surely have proved an attractive inducement to the mine's stockholders to provide additional investment capital.

The unfortunate fact remains that despite these apparent high hopes, no further documentation is available to confirm whether or not the Joker Mine realized successful production, much less which mineral(s) were actually mined. It may be possible that the Joker hauled its ore the .7 mile north to

the Rambler for processing in consideration that the Rambler had installed a matte smelter by 1906 and a concentrating plant in 1910 to treat low grade ores. However, no records were found to confirm such an arrangement between the two mines. If the Joker had in fact secured a processing agreement with the Rambler, the fire which destroyed the latter mine's buildings and facilities in 1918 may similarly have ended the Joker's opportunities for economical reduction of its ores.

Albany County tax records show that the Oneida Mining Company paid taxes on the mine into the 1930's, but went delinquent in payments by 1936.[33] A court judgement was issued in April, 1942 in favor of plaintiffs Clarence Hardell and S.D. Nelson against the Oneida Mining Company, (defendant). Hardell and Nelson succeeded in establishing title to the Joker claims over William Hardell, ("sole surviving trustee of the defunct company").[34] The last recorded taxes on the property were paid in 1944. It is doubtful, (based on the condition of the mine), that any serious mining took place at the Joker beyond that of the early 1900's boom period in the district. Taxes are suspected to have been paid over the ensuing years to hold the property for speculation.

It is probably safe to say that because the Joker escaped publicity in the geological literature and local press, it was ultimately a minor endeavor in the overall significance of the Douglas Creek district. However, the data gaps in the historical record have, if nothing else, served to intensify the mystery which the mine's physical presence alone evokes from its remote, secluded setting in the pines. As previously mentioned, these factors have conspired to preserve the Joker in a fashion which other more "significant" and accessible mines have not been as fortunate in attaining.

III. DESCRIPTION OF THE JOKER MINE

The Joker Mine consists of two log structures: a shaft house and adjacent cabin shown on the accompanying sketch map, (see Page no. 18). Both structures are deteriorated and face eventual collapse from natural weathering, but presently maintain fair structural integrity. Construction is suspected to date to 1905 or shortly before, based on the clear identification of the shaft house on the 1905 mineral survey plat, (see Page no. 20), and the known incorporation date of the Oneida Mining Company three years earlier in 1902.

The log shaft house, (WY-45-A), was constructed with a simple one-room rectangular floor plan measuring 34 ft. N-S by 21 ft. E-W. Wall logs were joined with sawn square notching, (see Photo WY-45-A-7). Interior wall logs were axe hewn. It is unclear why the additional labor was spent in hewing the interior log faces to create a uniform flat wall surface as there are no functional advantages readily evident. Mud chinking and wood strips were applied in the gaps between wall logs. Wire nails were also noted in construction. Doorways were placed in the north and south walls, (doors absent), and rectangular window openings were located on the north, east and west. Milled lumber was used in door and window frames, as well as for roofing planks. Milled lumber was readily available in the area with the completion of a sawmill at the nearby Rambler Mine by 1902.[35] North and south walls were gabled, however most of the roofing and supporting log purlins had collapsed into the structure. Gable apexes were about 10 ft. above ground level. Charred logs were noted at the southwest corner of the shaft house, raising the possibility of past fire damage to this or a previous structure.

Integrated into the shaft house at the south end was the massive, (approximately 25 ft. high), log headframe which was used to provide a support framework for raising and lowering miners, supplies and ore from the shaft below. The headframe is visible in Photos WY-45-1 through WY-45-A-6 as the superstructure projecting above the shaft house. As described by renowned mining historian Otis Young, "The headframe, with its giant sheaves, is the most prominent feature in almost any representation of the ordinary mine of the frontier period." [36] The "sheaves" referred to in the previous quote are the metal drums or pulleys typically placed at the apex of the headframe and over which passed the mechanically driven hoist cables. The sheave is missing from the Joker's headframe, but it was formerly located between the two small vertical log braces positioned immediately below the uppermost horizontal cross-member, (see Photos WY-45-1 through WY-45-A-3, and WY-45-A-6). The headframe support logs are leaning precariously to the west, posing the most serious threat to the overall stability of the shaft house, (see Photo WY-45-A-9).

A double compartment shaft lined with hewn log cribbing was located at the southeast corner of the shaft house. It is suspected that ore was hoisted up through one shaft compartment, while miners and supplies were likely raised and lowered via the adjoining compartment. Pivoting safety boards were placed in front of the open shafts about 3 ft. above ground level to provide a degree of protection from accidental falls, (see Photo WY-45-A-9). Waste rock and ore hauled to the surface were delivered through a hinged door, (still in place), and out through a chute located at the southeast corner of the shaft house, (see Photo WY-45-A-10). Waste rock piles, (small in relative comparison to the deep shaft development), are deposited outside and adjacent to the shaft house on the south and east sides.

Because mining operations were evidently conducted during the winter months at the Joker, the shaft house likely served to protect the miners from the elements and to house the mine's machinery, (hoist motors, pumps, boiler, etc.). Despite the obvious advantages of enclosing a headframe with a shaft house in this fashion, the arrangement may have presented safety problems, (particularly from fire), and the practice was made illegal in Nevada, for example, after 1911.[37] No equipment or mounting pads for such large machinery presently remain within the Joker's shaft house. This would suggest that the machinery was salvaged at some point in time, however this was accomplished without compromising the structural integrity of the shaft house in the process.

Immediately adjacent to the shaft house on the west was a small single room cabin, (WY-45-B). This cabin measured 10 ft. E-W x 11 ft. N-S. It consisted of 8 courses of v-notched logs, (about 7 ft. high), with both north and south facing doorways, (see Photos WY-45-B-1 and WY-45-B-2). Roofing was of milled planks over log poles, but the roof had collapsed into the cabin.

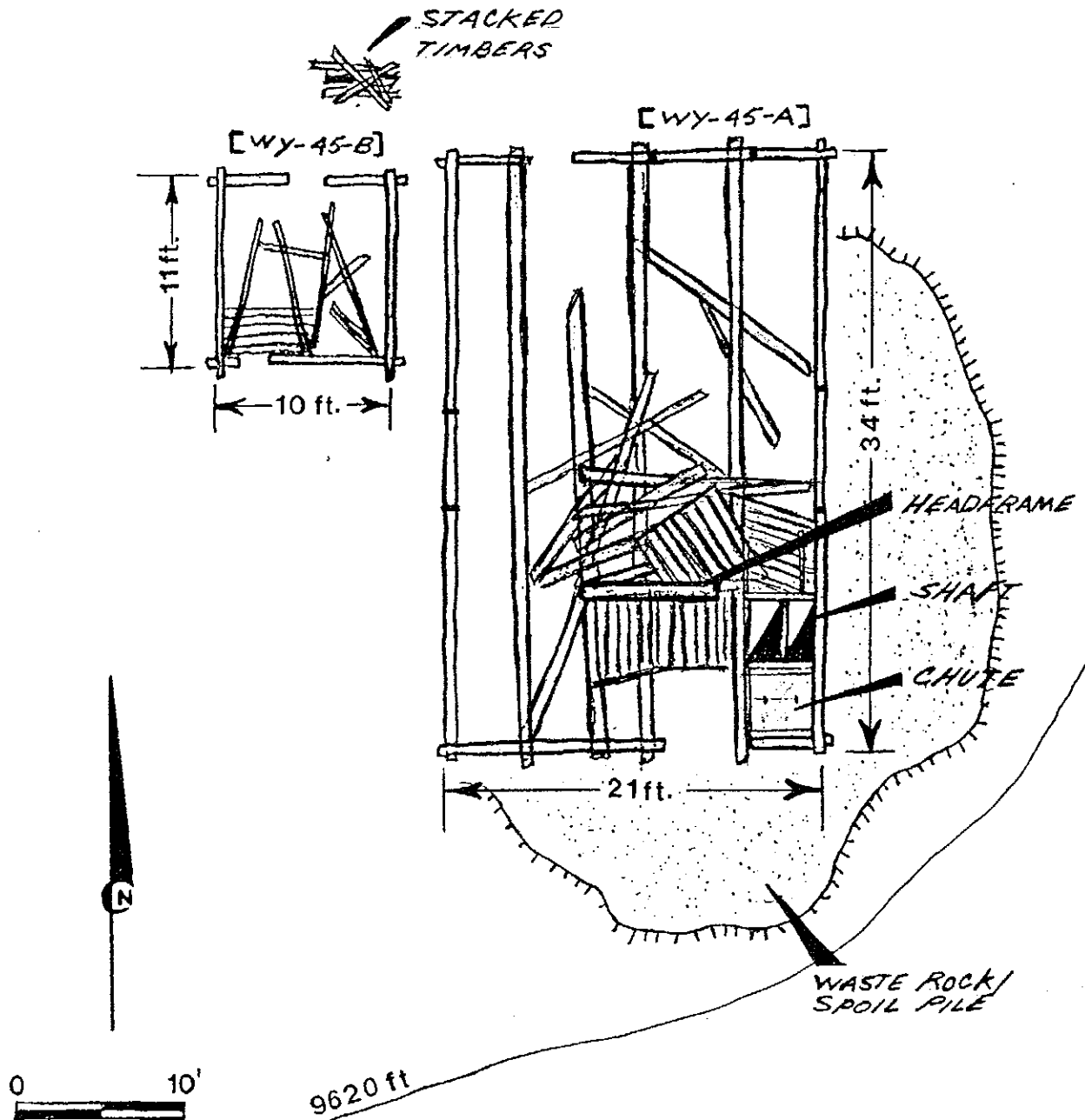
Despite the evidence of intensive mine activity and on-site habitation, artifactual remains were surprisingly light. These were limited to wire nails, bolts and washers, spikes, hole-in-top and sardine cans, a bucket and stacked timbers. No discrete historic trash dump was found which could conclusively be traced to activities at the Joker Mine.

IV. ENDNOTES

1. W. Dan Hausel, "Gold Districts of Wyoming," Geological Survey of Wyoming Report of Investigations No. 23 (Laramie: University of Wyoming, 1986), p. 19.
2. Henry C. Beeler, Mineral and Allied Resources of Albany County, Wyoming (Laramie: The Republican Press, 1906), p. 14.
3. Robert G. and Elizabeth L. Rosenberg, "Historic Overview of the Medicine Bow National Forest," Class I Cultural Resource Overview of the Medicine Bow National Forest (Laramie: High Plains Consultants, 1981), p. 159.
4. Hausel, p. 22.
5. Donald R. Currey, "The Keystone Gold-Copper Prospect Area, Albany County, Wyoming," Geological Survey of Wyoming Preliminary Report No. 3 (Laramie: University of Wyoming, 1965), p. 8.
6. Beeler, p. 11.
7. Skylar S. Scott, "Mining History of the Project Area," Final Report of Cultural Resource Investigations, Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality Abandoned Mine Lands Project No. 4, Albany and Carbon Counties, Wyoming (Laramie: Office of the Wyoming State Archeologist, 1986), pp. 24-25.
8. Hausel, p. 22.
9. Beeler, p. 39.
10. Ibid., p. 40.

11. M.E. McCallum and C.J. Orback, "The New Rambler Copper-Gold-Platinum District, Albany and Carbon Counties, Wyoming," Geological Survey of Wyoming Preliminary Report No. 8 (Laramie: University of Wyoming, 1968), pp. 9-10.
12. Laramie Boomerang, 17 January 1901.
13. Laramie Boomerang, 9 February 1901.
14. Laramie Boomerang, 26 August 1902.
15. Beeler, p. 42.
16. Frank R. Hollenback, The Laramie Plains Line (Denver: Sage Books, 1960), p. 14.
17. The Centennial Post, 17 November 1906.
18. The Wyoming Industrial Journal (Cheyenne: December, 1908), p. 11.
19. T.A. Larson, History of Wyoming (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), p. 340.
20. McCallum and Orback, p. 3.
21. Ibid., p. 3.
22. Rosenberg and Rosenberg, p. 159.
23. Certificate of Incorporation, (Oneida Mining Company), May 24, 1902.
24. Laramie Boomerang, 21 June 1902.
25. Certificate of Incorporation, (Oneida Mining Company), May 24, 1902, p. 1.
26. The Wyoming Industrial Journal (Cheyenne: January, 1902), p. 226.
27. Ibid., (December, 1902), p. 154.

28. Certificate Appointing Agent for Service and Locating Office of Corporation, May 4, 1903.
29. United States Surveyor-General's Office, Mineral Survey Plat No. 334, (Joker Claim Group), Cheyenne, October 23, 1905.
30. The Centennial Post, 13 January 1906.
31. Albany County Courthouse, Clerk and Recorder's Office, Deed Book No. 136, p. 513.
32. The Wyoming Industrial Journal (Cheyenne: October, 1906), p. 12.
33. Albany County Courthouse, Treasurer's Office, Tax Rolls for the Oneida Mining Company.
34. Albany County Courthouse, Clerk and Recorder's Office, Book V Miscellaneous Records, p. 116.
35. Laramie Boomerang, 26 August 1902.
36. Otis Young, Western Mining (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), p. 164.
37. Donald L. Hardesty, The Archaeology of Mining and Miners: A View From the Silver State (Pleasant Hill, CA: The Society For Historical Archaeology, 1988), p. 27.

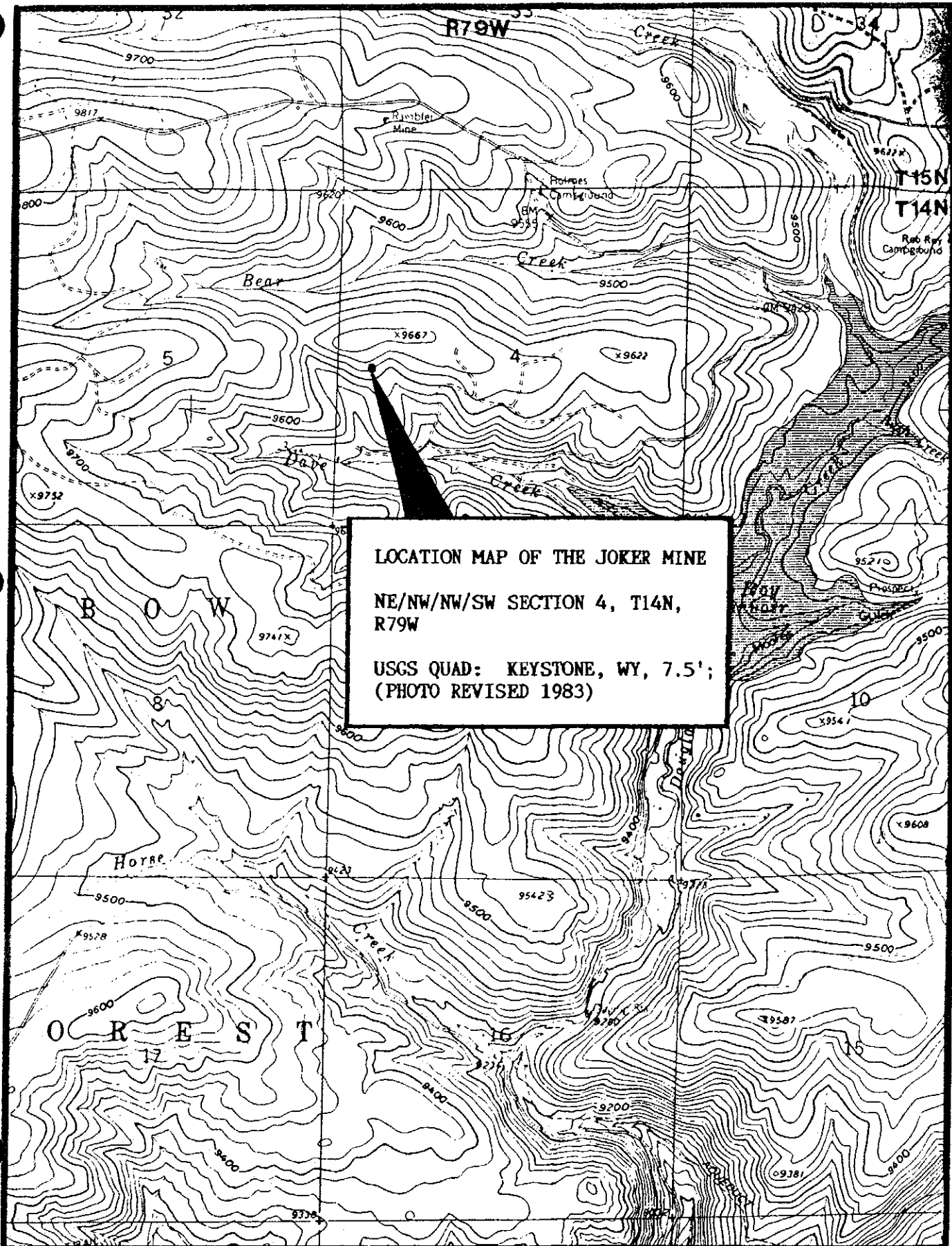


SKETCH MAP OF THE JOKER MINE:

WY-45-A - SHAFT HOUSE

WY-45-B - CABIN

S.G.L.
1989



V. ADDENDUM

On Page No. 7 of this HAER narrative report for the Joker Mine, it was stated in the bottom paragraph that "The original location notice for the Joker claim was not found in the Albany County mining records." However, the author's ongoing curiosity about this omission from the records led to additional research in the Albany County Courthouse after submission of the preceding HAER documentation to the National Park Service.

As a result of this research, the original location notices filed for the Joker No. 1 and Joker No. 2 claims [1], and the Joker No. 3 and Joker No. 4 claims [2] were finally uncovered. While these notices do not provide a great deal of new information on the continuing mystery of the mine, they do support one of the principal inferences made in the preceding historical discussion. That inference hinged on the likelihood that the Joker was located in response to the rich copper discoveries made at the nearby New Rambler mine in 1900. The date of the Joker location notices, April 20, 1901, (filed for record June 18, 1901), lend support to that probability. The original locators of the claim group were Leo and E.E. Krouskop. These individuals were not listed among the trustees of the Oneida Mining Company, and therefore evidently sold/conveyed their interests in the claims to the latter company within a year of the claim filings. No record of this property transaction, however, was found in the county records.

1. Albany County Courthouse, Clerk and Recorder's Office, Book G of Mining Records, p. 69.
2. Ibid., p. 70.

Additional information provided by the location notices include the observation that the claims were always known by the "Joker" name. Such is not always the case with historic mines which frequently undergo confusing name changes over the course of their development as a common result of new ownerships. The location notices do provide metes and bounds descriptions for the rectangular lode claims, but make no reference to the mineral for which the claims were filed. Therefore, the actual mineral(s) mined at the Joker and the level of production remain subject to speculation absent further detailed geological investigations.